

washingtonpost.com

Excess Energy

Tuesday, June 15, 2004; Page A22

THIS IS "ENERGY Week" down at the House of Representatives. Members are due to vote on at least four and possibly more bills, all related to domestic energy production, all designed to provoke the Senate to pass broad energy legislation, all designed, perhaps, to provide fodder for the election campaign. Some are also calling this Congress's answer to high gasoline prices -- but if this is the answer, maybe it's time to ask whether Congress even understands the question.

At least one of the votes is on a bill that isn't new at all: It's the same energy bill that passed the House last fall but was rejected by the Senate. This piece of legislation, accurately described by Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) as the "No Lobbyist Left Behind" bill, would provide tax breaks and subsidies for causes as varied as West Virginia coal miners, New Mexico Tech university, the Louisiana wetlands, remote communities in Alaska and Midwestern corn farmers, but would do precious little to reduce demand for energy. The only reason to vote on it a second time is to give Republicans the chance to claim that they tried to pass an energy bill in a summer of high gasoline prices -- and Democrats turned it down. Voters ought to have better sense than to believe them.

One of the other bills due for a vote might be best described as the energy bill's cousin, since it operates on the same favors-for-everybody principle as the original. Formally known as the Arctic Coastal Plain Domestic Energy Security and Abandoned Mine Lands Reclamation Reform Act, the bill links the opening of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling with the welfare of retired coal miners and miners' widows, by promising to use the revenue from the former to fund the health care benefits of the latter. Since separate bills to reauthorize legislation dealing with abandoned mines are available, there isn't any particular need to tie this cause to the completely unrelated cause of drilling in the ANWR except, again, to blame Democrats for depriving miners' widows of health care. It's a trick that's been used before. Drilling in the arctic refuge has been similarly linked to conservation funds, steel reinvestment, railroads and national parks, never with any notable success. Congress would do well to ignore it once again.

The other bills that may be voted on are peculiarly narrow. While there might have been a case for passing a stand-alone bill on electricity reliability, these others deal with issues that have received little attention. One would give the secretary of energy power to make decisions about investment in refineries. Another -- misleadingly called the Gasoline Price Reduction Act -- would make it possible to bypass state rules about fuel formulas in the event of major supply disruptions and would limit the number of new formulas. Still another would simplify the approval system for new renewable-energy projects. Environmentalists dislike all three, because they would streamline current environmental regulations, and state officials dislike the alteration to refinery rules, because it would circumvent their authority. Anyone who cares about the nation's energy supply should be upset for more basic reasons. It's hard to see why Congress is using up the few days it has left before summer recess on this type of

▼ ADVERTISING

When it
comes to
public
spending,
everyone's
watching.



grandstanding, and harder still to see how these votes will affect gasoline prices during anyone's summer vacation.

© 2004 The Washington Post Company

ADVERTISER LINKS		What's this?
<u>Energy Bill Energy Policy</u> Objective report on energy policy & the energy bill - updated daily! www.eedaily.com	<u>Why Care About ANWR?</u> See the book that has oil advocates in Congress fuming. www.mountaineersbooks.org	<u>AL Legislative Research</u> Complete Legislative Reports Total monitoring & tracking www.alrrs.com